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ABSTRACT

Several recent articles theorizing about the principalship are compared, contrasted and analyzed with focus on leadership and changing roles. One main difficulty found in the first article--a literature review (Murphy)--was the absence of clarity of definitions among researchers. Several common issues emerged, including a causal relationship between administrative leadership and organizational outcomes, the logistical support for educational innovation, an establishment of the relationship between interpersonal orientation and perceptions of role clarity, and an examination of the structural-functionalist tradition. The conclusions are based on the lack of disciplined research based on one theoretical model. Suggestions are given for further research as to placement of the principal within the school organization, the location of the principal and the school site within the school district, and the application of the power and conflict model regarding the principalship. (LMS)

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THEORIZING ABOUT THE PRINCIPALSHIP

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Theorizing About the Principalship

I am pleased to be able to comment on a group of interesting papers. I am most gratified that they fortuitously arrived in the order in which I am going to critique them.

Murphy's comprehensive paper arrived first in which he reviews the literature on educational leadership. This comprehensive review served to organize the material presented in the rest of the papers. All of the papers are carefully prepared, interesting, and, I believe, useful in the act of theorizing about the principal.

Murphy's paper infers that the principal has been viewed primarily as an instructional leader. In the investigation of this characteristic of principals, certain weaknesses are evident and certain areas of knowledge have been strengthened. As I reviewed the papers that arrived subsequently I tried to fit them, in a general way, to the discussion presented by Murphy.

A few areas of concern emerged. Murphy states that studies have not used research designs that allow for the establishment of a causal relationship between administrative leadership and organizational outcomes. He discusses at great length the absence of clarity of definitions. His review also argues for research which highlights the contextual aspects of leadership. He asks, is the construct, instructional leadership, useful in the conduct of research

regarding the principal? Consistent with the title of this session, I would answer in the affirmative. One way to theorize about the principal is to view this role as one of instructional leadership.

Before I leave the Murphy paper I would like to ask that his suggestion that one way to investigate instructional leadership is to look at the training programs be heeded by us.

The Ellis study, The amount of logistical support for an educational innovation and the extent of teachers' implementation of that innovation is one which attempts to provide a definition of instructional leadership. She places logistical support as one dimension of leadership at the reality level and the symbolic. She clarifies: reality is the act; symbolic reflects the priorities of the unit, school, district or community. The way this paper is written shows clearly how logistical support affects implementation but does not show how the principal's leadership role interacts with either the provision of logistical support or with the implementation process. We are, thus, left with an incomplete definition of leadership (in terms of the principal). This report is an excellent example of the complexity of trying to isolate the components which may comprise leadership. This study, however, links logistical support and implementation establishing a causal relationship.

In contrast, the Bifano report focuses on deriving a conceptual explanation of the elementary principalship through the application of the Argyris and Schon espoused theory (what we say we do) and the theory-in-use (that which governs what we do). This study applied more than one methodology in order to provide rigor to the application of her conceptual framework. The case study data she presents supporting the application is fascinating. The theory-in-use Model I, maintaining control over the goal, procedures, and tasks and Model II, generating valid information from those involved are applied to the case studies.

She shows that when Model II is in place, that is, both principal and teachers agree that the school is run through the generation of information by all of those involved, the resultant school setting is dramatically different from that where Model I is operant. To my mind, there is no question as to which setting is to be preferred. The inferences from this study are provocative. The preferred leadership style is inferred as well as the identification of the necessary organizational currency, information, which is applicable to administration.

Armstrong's conceptual framework emphasis is an attempt to establish a relationship between Machiavellianism interpersonal orientation in the principalship and perceptions of role clarity and work statisfaction. Her report findings showing relatively high role clarity are consistent with earlier reports dealing with Machiavellianism in schools.

The consistency that principals tend to be low machs and that low macks perceive high role clarity points to interesting speculation regarding school organizational cultures. The consistency with which principals are satisfied with their work is also intriguing. High role clarity and high job satisfaction indicates that for principals, the perceptions of the role expectations of the job situation are more powerful influences on their perceptions of job satisfaction than their interpersonal orientation. This, I believe, points to the consideration of contextual aspects when examining the principalship.

Peterson and Slater advocate examining the principalship through the structural-functionalist tradition, the cultural-social constructionist model and conflict theory. The Ellis study and to some extent the Bifano study may be considered within the structual-functionalist tradition. Armstrong's and to some extent Bifano's study lie in the cultural-social constructionist model. The conflict theory tradition is not represented.

In sum, even though researchers have reported much on the principalship, in fact, the research has not been disciplined or focused on any one theoretical tradition or model. That is probably what we should realize from this session. Are we prepared to examine our work and other's in order to place it on one or another of the theoretical traditions? Are we prepared to conduct our research in such a manner that theory regarding the principal will be

generated and forwarded? I believe this is our next serious task in this endeavor.

So, what do I perceive as our first steps? In heeding Peterson and Slater, the first area that to me appears crucial to clarify is to determine the actual placement of the principal within the school organization. Applying the structural functionalist tradition, the principal's work might be examined in light of the role limitations and possibilities. Is instruction primary and are students precious? In terms of Inkle's socialization matrix, does the principal appreciate "the issue," the reason for being, the mission of the school site and the inherent parameters within that? Does the principal identify the primary agent in order to obtain support and direction for work accomplishment and role enactment? Does the principal's primary agent assume the responsibility for providing this direction and support? Conversely, does the principal provide primary agent direction and support to teachers? What about the objectives and task accomplishment? If instructional leadership is what is sought in the principalship what structural components aid and/or hamper?

Another aspect to consider in this regard is the location of the principal and the school site within the school district. As stated before, many of these studies are reported, but the message of their findings does not seem to be appreciated by the policy makers and researchers. For example, when we examine the current reform programs and

the 1988 AERA presentations we note a preoccupation with the principal, teacher and school site without regard to the superintendency or other structures.

In terms of the cultural-social constructionist model, the principal's symbolic role as well as the actual might be determined. The analogy which might fit is that of the social system of bees. If schools are loosely-coupled and cellular, the application of the social system of bees might be appropriate. How does the bee's hive, the queen bee, drone and worker bee roles fulfill their social obligations? Might the superintendency position, principalship and teacher roles be viewed likewise? To illustrate further, let me offer the following: the queen bee cannot do all that is required for the hive. The drones (community and or board) provide buzzing functions as the worker bees service the hive and queen bee in the interest of the young and future generation. In examining further, these roles are explicit and contribute specifically.

There are also some very interesting characteristics to consider. They don't sting each other. They don't strive to make their cell the biggest in the comb. They don't steal from each other. They guide each other to the discovered flower. They don't exclude each other. This social system sustains itself in a healthy manner. Our next question, then, is: How can understanding the principalship from a cultural perspective aid in the formulation of policy and the enactment of action?

Lastly, how does the application of the power and conflict model direct research and interpretation regarding the principalship? It appears to me that part of specifying the location of the principal within the organization is related to the way power is assumed and used by the school participants as well as by the way conflict is controlled and/or avoided. For example, if one examines the tragedy of Challenger, a critical aspect to determine is the decision making process that took place. There is evidence that primacy was granted to other factors besides safety. This took place because the assumption and use of power was distorted, and/or misplaced, and/or misdirected. Thus, an examination of authorized and unauthorized power is necessary. How do these dynamics take place in the school district and how do the derived actions affect excellence and equity?

Also of interest is the use of metaphors. Note that the example cited above was named the Challenger.

In closing, it seems to me we have an exciting task ahead of us.